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FACEBOOK KISSES AND MAKES UP WITH AUSTRALIAN GOVT

The social media giant said talks were held with the Australian government to amend the proposed media bargaining laws

LAST-MINUTE FACE-SAVING COMPROMISE

According to reports, the face-saving compromise will see Facebook as well as internet search giant Google plunge tens of millions of dollars into the struggling local news sector. In return, the US digital firms will not be subjected to mandatory payments that could cost them vastly more and create what they see as an alarming global precedent

NEW LAW LIKELY TO BE PASSED THIS WEEK

- Facebook had blocked news feed in Australia last week following dispute on paying news organisations for sharing content
- Inadvertently, some government pages and announcements on Covid-19 were blocked too, drawing backlash
- Australian Parliament is expected to pass the law this week

$28 bn

FACEBOOK'S REVENUE IN THE OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2020 QUARTER

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

PROOF SKETCHY, COURT SHOWS THE BAIL DISHA

Says people can't be arrested just because they disagree with govt policies; invoking sedition to massage egos not done

KANU SARDA @ New Delhi

A Delhi court on Tuesday granted bail to 22-year-old climate change activist Disha Ravi, who was arrested in connection with the toolkit case, citing scanty and sketchy investigation.

Additional Sessions Judge Dharmendra Rana said, "Citizens are conscience keepers of government in any democratic nation. They cannot be put behind bars simply because they choose to disagree with the state policies. The offence of sedition cannot be invoked to minister to the wounded vanity of the governments."

The 18-page bail order said, "Even our founding fathers accorded due respect to divergence of opinion by recognising the freedom of speech and expression as an inviolable fundamental right."

Shortly after bail was granted, another judge, Pankaj Sharma, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate of the Patiala House Court, disposed of a Delhi Police application seeking Disha's extended custody. The police had sought four more days of custody.

While citing a couplet from Rig Veda, which says 'let noble thoughts come to me from all directions,' the judge said, "Difference of opinion, disagreement, divergence, dissent, or for that matter even disapprobation, are recognised legitimate tools to infuse objectivity in state policies. An aware and assertive citizenry, in contradistinction with an indifferent or docile citizenry, is indisputably a sign of a healthy and vibrant democracy."

Disha Ravi (C) arrives at Patiala House Court, in Delhi on Tuesday | SHEKHAR YADAV

Expressing concern over the sketchy probe, th court said, "Considering the scanty and sketchy evidence available on record, I do not find any palpable reasons to breach the general rule of 'Bail' against a 22-year-old young lady, with absolutely blemish-free criminal antecedents and having firm roots in the society, and send her to jail."

He also said the police are in the process of collecting more evidence and so they cannot be allowed to further restrict the liberty of a citizen on the basis of propitious anticipations. "The resistance to bail plea seems to be more ornamental in nature," said the judge. P9

Parents eagerly await activist's return home

M G CHETAN @ Bengaluru

THERE was a perceptible change in mood at the residence of Manjula Nanjaiah and Ravi Annappa after news of their 22-year-old daughter Disha Ravi being granted bail on Tuesday afternoon came out. And the change for the better was not only evident on the faces of the parents but also in the behaviour of Disha's pet Alsatian dog, Sammy, who, after 10 days of sulking as he was missing her, was seen friskily moving about the house.

In fact, Sammy was the first one to get a tight hug from Disha's relieved mother on hearing about her getting bail. This probably conveyed to Sammy's sharp canine instincts about something good happening to Disha who she so dearly missed.

Disha was arrested by the Delhi police from their Soladevanahalli residence in Bengaluru on February 13 for editing and sharing a 'toolkit', allegedly for use in instigating and guiding the farmers' protest against the Centre's farm laws. Disha's arrest and subsequent slapping of sedition charges against her had garnered national and international criticism.

CONTINUED ON: P5

A police team at the site where six people were killed after gelatin sticks which they were transporting exploded, in Chikkaballapur district on Tuesday | EXPRESS

6 die while trying to dispose of explosives

V VELAYUDHAM @ Hirenagaveli village (Chikkaballapur district)

SIX people working at a stone-crushing unit were killed and one person was injured when the gelatin sticks they were carrying in a mini truck exploded near Hirenagaveli village on the outskirts of Chikkaballapur around 12.30 am on Tuesday. This comes just about a month after eight people lost their lives in a similar incident at Hunasodu near Shivamogga.

Following Tuesday's incident, the government has ordered an investigation by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa even declared that "merciless action" will be taken against those involved in illegal quarrying.

Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai, who visited the spot, said the government will take strict action against those responsible for the incident. The police have found liquor bottles, cigarettes, match box, snacks and also parts of mobile phones, at the blast site. The explosives could be petroleum gel and ammonium nitrate, and a detailed investigation will reveal their exact nature, he said. He also announced a compensation of Rs 5 lakh to the families of each of the deceased.

Fearing raids, the workers were shifting the gelatin sticks clandestinely in a mini truck, tailed by a two-wheeler, to dispose them when there was a massive explosion. The impact was such that the dismembered parts of the bodies were strewn around in a half-km radius in the quarry. P4

Pained by the loss of lives due to a mishap at Chikkaballapur in Karnataka. Condolences to the bereaved families. Praying that the injured recover quickly

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

2 ex-CMs lambast state govt

Former CMs Siddaramaiah and H D Kumaraswamy slammed the BJP government for failing to prevent such incidents. Siddaramaiah also demanded a judicial inquiry into the blast.

daCunha/AB/729

Blow to Oli as Nepal SC revives House

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

IN a major setback for Nepal Prime Minister **K P Sharma Oli**, the country's Supreme Court has reinstated Parliament, which was dissolved in December last year. In a landmark ruling on Tuesday a five-member Constitutional bench, led by Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher, annulled the Oli government's 'unconstitutional' decision to dissolve the 275-member lower House of Parliament. The court also ordered the government to summon the House session within the next 13 days.

Nepal plunged into a political crisis on December 20 after President Bidya Dev Bhandari dissolved the House and announced fresh elections on April 30 and May 10 at the recommendation of PM Oli, amidst a tussle for power within the ruling Nepal Communist Party.

In his letter recommending House dissolution, Oli said he controlled 64% majority in the House and the country needed a fresh mandate of the people to ensure stability.

Oli's move to dissolve the House sparked protests from a large section of the NCP led by his rival Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', also a co-chair of the ruling party.

As many as 13 writ petitions, including the one by the ruling party's Chief Whip Dev Prasad Gurung, were filed in the apex court seeking the restoration of the lower House of Parliament.

Cong swept out by BJP in Guj local body polls

SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI

A listless Congress found itself whipped by the electorate in Gujarat, as results of the local body polls came in on Tuesday. While there was no surprise in the BJP sweeping the municipal corporation elections, the Congress was forced to cede a part of its opposition space to Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and to a lesser extent to Asaduddin Owasi's Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen.

Of the six municipal corporations that went to polls, the Congress drew a blank in Surat and trailed way behind the BJP in the other five. In contrast, the AAP won 27 seats in Surat while the BJP got 93 of the 120 that were up for grabs. In the Ahmadabad Municipal Corporation, out of 192 seats, the BJP was way ahead of the Congress, while MIM opened account with seven seats. P9

HUGE SHOW OF STRENGTH

Around 30,000 private school staffers, including teachers, take out a protest march in Bengaluru on Tuesday. Among other issues, they are demanding withdrawal of the order mandating a 30 per cent cut in tuition fee, and submitted a memorandum to Primary and Secondary Education Minister S Suresh Kumar | EXPRESS | P2

EXPRESS READ

Coal case: CBI examines TMC MP Abhishek's wife

Kolkata: A CBI team examined Trinamool Congress MP Abhishek Banerjee's wife Rujira on Tuesday in connection with the coal pilferage case. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee visited the residence of her nephew Abhishek in south Kolkata minutes before the CBI team landed there | P10

US' virus deaths match the toll of three wars

Baltimore: The Covid-19 death toll in the US has topped 500,000, a figure that matches the number of Americans killed in World War II, Korea and Vietnam combined. The US recorded an estimated 405,000 deaths in World War II, 58,000 in the Vietnam War and 36,000 in the Korean War.

Surge in cases not due to new Covid variants, says govt

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

THE Centre on Tuesday clarified that the recent spurt in Covid-19 cases in some states is not due to the mutated versions of the coronavirus.

"Based on information available with us, yes these variants are there, but there's no reason to believe that these are responsible for the upsurge of the outbreak in some districts of Maharashtra and Kerala," said V K Paul, member (health), Niti Aayog.

Paul, who also heads the national Covid-19 task force, added two variants of SARS CoV 2 — N440K and E484K — have been detected in Maharashtra, Kerala and Telangana.

Kerala has 38% of the total active cases of the country while Maharashtra has 37%. The other states showing an upward trend in daily Covid-19 cases are Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

IT'S A LONG ROAD

Hop, skip and jump takes new meaning at this school

Students jumping over the compound wall to reach their school | NAGARAJA GADEKAL

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

FOR children studying in the Government Primary School at Vignana Nagar in KR Puram, reaching the school has almost become a steeple chase. With no proper access road, they are forced to scale a four-foot-high compound wall, erected recently by the owner of an adjacent piece of land.

Though regular classes have not yet commenced for students up to Class 5, teachers come to the school every day. Some students, however, do come to meet teachers and clarify doubts, collect books and uniforms. They also visit the school once a month to collect grains and groceries which are given instead of midday meals.

Once the school reopens, it will be difficult for children as they will have to jump the compound wall every day. Not just this, since there is no access road, the midday meal van cannot reach the school premises. Anu, an anxious parent, said, "The wall is quite high. I am scared that my son may fall and get hurt."

The school was allotted 0.75 acres of land in 2005-06 and got its own building in 2011. Presently, there are 48 students studying from Classes 1 to 5, including 20 girls. All these years, the school was accessible from the main road through the adjacent private land. CONTINUED ON: P7